

# An Occasional Newsletter

## Forthcoming CTiW 2017 AGM

The CTiW 2017 AGM will be held on Monday, 16 January at 6.30 for 7pm-9pm at Crown Court Church of Scotland. The theme of the evening will be homelessness in Westminster, and will feature a speaker and displays by organisations working in this field. Refreshments. All are very welcome to attend. Please come and give us your support.

### How we organise ourselves

*The Executive of CTiW is looking at the way we are structured and at how we can bring the way we currently do things more into line with national guidelines and good practice. At the AGM in January, we will give a brief update of where we have got to and the direction we expect to take. We intend to find ways of involving more people in setting our direction. Please watch this space!*

## "Meet the Neighbours" at Westminster Quakers

On Monday Nov 16<sup>th</sup>, about 40 members of CTiW churches visited the Quaker Meeting House in St Martin's Lane.

We were warmly welcomed and, after some time of getting to know one another and catching up with folk, we were invited into the Meeting Room. Various Friends shared information and personal insight and story, and then invited us into a Worship Time of 15 minutes silence and spoken ministry. It was a powerful testimony to the need for silence, and the power of presence.

Following the silence, we had time for discussion, questions and exploration – those of us who were visiting were grateful to the Friends for their willingness to share significantly, not simply facts, but themselves and the experience of their spirituality.

The welcome continued as we shared food and time for conversation after our experience of "Meeting". This is always one of the significant part of the "Meet the Neighbours" events –



The Library

times to be together and meet real people, rather simply names of congregations. We are grateful to the Friends for their invitation and welcome, to those who worked to organise the event, and to all those who came along.

Rev'd Ruth Gouldbourne

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## Dates for your diary

### 2017

Monday, 16 January—CTiW AGM  
with Speaker at Crown Court Church  
of Scotland, Russell Street, WC2B 5EZ  
at 6.30 for 7pm—9pm

18-25 January—Week of  
Prayer for Christian Unity

22 January—Homeless Sunday

26 February—Church Action on  
Poverty Sunday

Note: Venues and dates may be  
subject to change

If your church is interested in  
hosting a future "Meet the  
Neighbours" we should be  
pleased to hear from you

## Contact us

Website: [www.ctiw.london](http://www.ctiw.london)

Email: [ctiw.net@gmail.com](mailto:ctiw.net@gmail.com)

## PRISONS WEEK 2016

This year Prisons Week – from 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> October—was marked by more London churches, of many different denominations than ever before. As a result, more Christian congregations have become aware that more men, women and children are held in British prisons than any other countries in Western Europe. Some of them want to learn more about this very disturbing situation. Others are keen to explore the options for Christian ministry in this field.

Churches together in Westminster (CTiW) began its Prisons Mission in 2013. This brings together several churches whose members visit some of London's huge prisons. They volunteer to support the multi-faith Chaplaincy Teams in their very difficult and demanding work with inmates and their families. The Prisons Mission participants take their learning back to the churches which are formally "engaged" with the project.

For the second year CTiW published a booklet *"Resources for Prisons Week"* which was distributed to all member churches. The purpose was to encourage and enable both ordained and lay people to devise interesting and effective forms of worship and other church activities to bring this sensitive and controversial subject to the attention of congregations. The new booklet is much more comprehensive than previously. It contains a wider variety of prayers and other material drawn from different denominations, as well as a list of organisations which provide knowledge and services relevant to prisons, ex-offenders and rehabilitations. There is also a quiz which is a useful aid to discussions about prisons and the criminal justice system. The booklet demonstrates authenticity, as it is compiled by participants. Although the booklet was prepared for CTiW members in London, we have learned that it was circulated much more widely throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as overseas. We need the views, advice and suggestions of all users of the booklet so that we can make improvements to its value and effectiveness next year.

We have asked for reports of Prisons Week services and activities arranged by many churches. We can only reproduce very brief summaries within this newsletter, but hope these will help churches to plan for further improvements in the ways they mark Prisons Week in 2017. We expect this to be from 8<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> October.

### BISHOP LANGSTAFF LAUNCHES PRISONS WEEK

Prisons week was launched this year at a service in the Chapel of Pentonville prison on 10 October led by Bishop James Langstaff who is the Anglican Bishop for Prisons. The service was attended by the local chaplain Reverend Rock Sturt and several chaplains from other prisons, as well as priests and ministers from elsewhere

and officials from the National Offender Management Service. About a dozen prisons inmates were also present and several of them read prayers and poems they had written specially for the event. These were heartfelt and moving.

Bishop Langstaff announced the launch of Prison Hope which in 2017 will begin a new national initiative to attract many more churches to support and pray for local prisons, encourage volunteering and focus on the hope inspired by Jesus. This can be contacted at [info@prisonhope.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonhope.org.uk).

### PRISON GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

During Prisons Week, an inmate, at Pentonville Prison, was murdered by another prisoner. This was the seventh homicide this year. There were also 105 self-inflicted deaths. On 12 October the Prison Governors Association called for an "independent public inquiry into the unpredicted rise in violence, self-harm and suicides in prisons". Bishop Moth, the Catholic liaison Bishop for Prisons, welcomed this announcement and explained that it "underlines the current serious state of prison service".

### ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Barbara Ridpath, the Director of St Paul's Institute, considered the booklet to be "really beautifully done and deserving a wide circulation". She sent it out to the Institute's mailing list of all Diocesan clergy. Also, the Minor Canons of the cathedral used the booklet for the intercessions every day of Prisons Week.

### ST MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS

On 12 October St Martin-in-the-Fields held a special service for Prisons Week at an open gathering entitled "Bread for the World" which takes place every Wednesday at 6.30pm and is open to all. First there was an informal Eucharist in which we gathered around an altar, this was followed by a simple supper and then reflective groups met to discuss and share their thoughts.

The Gospel chosen for the Eucharist was the lost Sons (Luke 15). In the reflections which followed, Revd Richard Carter explored what it means "to come to one's senses", as the younger son does and also the very different responses to the younger son's return by the father and brother. He then reflected on his recent visits to London prisons and his shock at realising how those incarcerated could come out more damaged than they went in. He commented on the chronic shortage of staff, the result of the prisoners being locked in small cells for 23 hours a day, the fear, anger and tension of their experiences. How could anyone emerge from that more stable and able to go straight? He described the high level of reoffending and asked why we are treating prisoners in such an inhuman

way and argued that the aim of the criminal justice system should be to try to prevent crime, rather than create a system which makes crime more likely. John Plummer compared his experience of visiting many prisons in the U.K with the approach in other countries where restorative justice plays a crucial part. Christ's parable shows that restoration not only needs the lost son to be given the chance to return, but also the opportunity for his brother to accept him back. Without the opportunity for that, there can never be a healing of the wounds and divisions. During the supper after the service, we reflected on "coming to one's senses". What is the meaning and purpose of punishment and the nature of reconciliation or forgiveness? Is reconciliation possible without underestimating the enormity of crime and the hurt and pain caused to victims? We wondered if our society can create a system which is both more humane and also safer. One which can bring reconciliations and health for both victims and perpetrators.

### METHODIST CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER

Revd Gordon Newton convened a group at Methodist Central Hall on 19 October as part of the autumn series of "God at Work in the World". This time 'Life in Prison and beyond'. The group included people with experience of working with offenders in prisons in the U.K and overseas, in a family visits centre, in secure hospitals, among homeless people, and as chaplains in young offenders and high security establishments.

John Plummer, Coordinator of the CTiW Prisons Mission gave a very informative talk about the current crisis in Britain's overcrowded prisons.

Discussions focused on the low level of purposeful activities in prisons, the consequences of reduced staffing levels, short custodial sentences and frequent transfers between prisons. The isolation of sex-offenders when they are released from prisons was considered alongside the problems of such people being denied access to employment and even voluntary work. The outcome of such isolation leaves such people with a sense of futility about life and increases the risks of re-offending. The very high numbers of people in prisons was not thought to be necessary for the safety of society. The rising levels of self-harm and suicide should cause concern.

### MOUNT STREET JESUIT CENTRE. CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. FARM STREET

Revd Dominic Robinson SJ reports that on 13<sup>th</sup> October John Plummer and Finna Ayres from St James Piccadilly gave a most informative stimulating presentation on current issues in the care of prisoners in the UK. The audience was ecumenical and represented keen interests in the criminal justice system including pastoral work and befriending services with prisoners. The London Jesuit vol-

unteers visit and befriend prisoners and help chaplains with worship. Farm Street Church also hosts appeals by PACT ( Prison Advisory Care Trust) at all Masses held during Prisons Week and the needs of prisoners and issues around the criminal justice system are related to the many charitable and awareness raising activities. The Jesuit Refugee Service is also involved in visiting and supporting asylum seekers in detention centres.

### ST COLUMBA'S CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, PONT STREET

The minister, Revd Angus McLeod, included the Quiz from the CTiW Prisons Week Resource booklet within the Church Magazine before Prisons Week. The statistics about the prison population were included in the Order of Service for 9 October. Margaret Valance, a member of the Church and the Independent Monitoring Board of HMP Guys' Marsh, described her experience at the morning service, and in the afternoon, John Plummer gave the Congregation a Talk entitled "Prisons- Out of sight and Out of mind". They both painted a grim picture of the issues facing the prison community and encouraged those present to consider what a "welcoming church" should look like for those leaving prison. Marking Prisons Week in this way raised awareness of the need to consider opportunities for Christian ministry with prisoners and ex-offenders.

### BLOOMSBURY CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

Co-minister Revd Ruth Gouldbourne explains that on the second Sunday of each month the Sunday Pilgrim evening service takes as its focus "unexplained pathways", which allows us to reflect on contemporary issues in the light of faith and practice. On 9<sup>th</sup> October we focused on prisons and imprisonment. We used the quiz from the CTiW booklet and people found the answers startling and at times deeply disturbing. This led us to discuss how we might react to the issues and what it would look like to be a "welcoming church" and more broadly, what is the purpose of the prison system. We discussed restorative justice, rehabilitation, and our own experiences of being "victims" of crime. We spent time in prayer, using material from the booklet, letting this lead us into other forms of prayer. This was important and helped us understand more and engaged in ways which affected our prayer and will shape discussions in future.

### ALL SAINTS' FULHAM

All the services at All Saints, Fulham on 16 October addressed the theme of the church's mission to those in prison. At the 8:00am Communion, Revd Penny Seabrook spoke of the need for prayer and persistence in the duty to redress injustice, and closed with the Prisons Week prayer. At the 09:30 Choral Matins, John Plummer gave a moving sermon which described the challenges facing the Prisons Services and the plight of those who are serving custodial sentences.

At the 11:30am Family Eucharist, Revd Penny helped the children act out the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18) and related this to the issues raised in the earlier sermon. All the services used prayers from the CTIW booklet and sang hymns to complement the theme of the day. Notices for the Day included an invitation to the follow up meeting for those interested in exploring the subject further.

On 15<sup>th</sup> November this meeting took place and was attended by twenty plus members with particular interest or knowledge. From this several have decided to undertake an explanatory visit to Bronzefield prison arranged and supported by the CTIW Prisons Mission, and others are beginning related forms of Christian Ministry, all of which will be encouraged by the PCC.

### ST GEORGE'S HANOVER SQUARE

As one of the three London churches to have piloted the CTIW Prisons Mission, St George's has several members of the congregation who are active participants and regularly work with Prison Chaplaincy Teams, reporting back to the PCC and explaining the activities through the Parish Newsletter.

On 9<sup>th</sup> October both Prisons Week and Harvest Festival were celebrated with the collection donated to the West London Mission, for its work with homeless and marginalised people. The service aimed to focus thought and prayer on the men, women and children detained behind prison walls, to ensure that they are not "out of sight and out of mind".

Alistair Milward explained his experiences of Wandsworth prison where he mentors inmates before and after their discharge. The Community Chaplaincy Trust provides training for volunteers like him to befriend men when they are preparing for release, and keeps in touch with them as they try to resettle outside. He said that, "If I thought I could have any meaningful impact on the horrendous statistics of self-harm, recidivism, substance abuse, and suicides, I needn't have bothered. They are huge problems. But, given what I have seen and learned and found in myself to offer to another person, it fills me with almost a perverse confidence that I might, just might, actually make a difference to someone else. Someone of whom the concept of hope has got lost in their locked up world."

Prayers and Intercessions led by John Rowland, another Prisons Mission Participant, were for victims of crime, perpetrators, those who work in the criminal justice system and inside prisons.

### WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

Caritas Westminster and PACT, the Catholic prisoner's charity, combined to hold a Prisons Week meeting at

## PRISONS WEEK 2016 Continued...

the cathedral on 11 October. The purpose was to encourage more people to reach out to those presently in prison and those recently released. Mgr Martin Hayes began by reading from St Matthew's Gospel (Ch. 25) "when I was in prison you visited me." He explained how the work of prison volunteers is truly the Lord's work.

John Colby, the Director of Caritas told the story of the troubled past of a young person who is trying to rebuild his life after family tragedy, drugs, mental illness, crime and prison and asked all those present to consider and learn from his experiences. Fr Roger Reader described his extensive work as a prison chaplain for both young and adult offenders, and explained the need for, and value of, volunteers who practice this Christian ministry.

### CAPITAL MASS. ALL SOUL'S LANGHAM PLACE

Capital Mass is a joint venture between the Church Urban Fund and Anglican Diocese of London which aims to engage and equip every parish in tackling poverty and inequality. Since the summer, Executive Director Andy Burns had brought together a diverse group of a dozen organisations concerned with Christians working with prisoners and ex-offenders, to plan a Prisons Week event at All Souls' church. The purpose was to provide information to churches about how they and their congregations could make a useful contribution through work inside prisons or assisting with resettlement and rehabilitation. The event was opened by Bishop Graham Tomlin, who is responsible for the prisons in London and has recently visited all of them to meet the chaplains.

He explained the value of the work done in prisons by Christian volunteers and the importance of forgiveness and redemption. The organisations then described their work and outlined the wide variety of opportunities for the active involvement of churches. Capital Mass has established a very vigorous website listing all the organisations. ([www.capitalmass.org.uk](http://www.capitalmass.org.uk))

### VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

There is a wide variety of opportunities for volunteers who have different skills and aptitudes and varying amounts of time to give. Further details can be found from all the organisations mentioned in the reports. For those who are interested in the subject, but unable or unwilling to undertake challenging work inside prisons there are other options for useful and rewarding forms of ministry.

One – is to become a PRISONER'S PENFRIEND. Information about the training and support for this can be found from [gwyn.morgan@prisonerspenfriends.org](mailto:gwyn.morgan@prisonerspenfriends.org) This charity both advises and protects home addresses of pen friends.

*John Plummer  
Coordinator. Prisons Mission  
Churches Together in Westminster*